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ABSTRACT

In the early 1980s, the National Commission on Excellence in Education called for reforming the recruitment of educational administrators. Today, this call has heightened importance because nearly half of the nation's superintendents report difficulty in filling principal vacancies. This research contributes to the literature about the principalship by examining whether teacher reactions to aspects of the principalship are subject to individual differences among the teachers and by using teachers, rather than administrators, as study participants. Seventy percent (n=139) of the students enrolled in educational administration classes elected to participate. The study sample consisted of nearly equal member of females and males. Multiple-regression analysis was used, in which teacher characteristics, job attributes, and working conditions served as independent variables, and teacher ratings of the principal's job served as the dependent variable. Results showed that most of the participants were highly attracted to the job and attributes of the job "swamped" other variables in terms of job attraction. Internal conditions of the workplace, such as the potential for job-related stress and time requirements, mitigated the positive influence of the job attributes. Female teachers were more likely to be deterred by the undesirable working conditions than were male teachers. Further research is recommended, such as investigating whether community leaders have unilateral power to alter the principal's role. (Contains 19 references and 3 tables.) (RT)

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An Investigation of Variables that Influence Teacher Attraction for the Principalship

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R. NEWTON

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This research assessed whether features of the role and conditions of the workplace influence teacher attraction to the principalship. Teacher attraction varied by gender with females rating the principalship less favorably than males. Although features of the role enhanced attraction, conditions of the workplace mitigated that positive influence. The findings have implications for current efforts to redesign the principal's role.

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An Investigation of Variables that Influence Teacher Attraction for the Principalship

In the early 1980s the National Commission on Excellence in Education called for reforming the recruitment of educational administrators (A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform, 1983). Today, this call has heightened importance because nearly half of the nation's superintendents report difficulty in filling principal vacancies (Educational Research Service [ERS], 1998). The critical shortage of qualified applicants has focused attention on conditions of the principal's work environment. More specifically, superintendents and principals maintain that an inadequate salary, job-related stress, the length of the workweek and school year, and expectations for principals to "fix" societal problems diminish teacher attraction for the job (Doud & Keller, 1998; ERS, 1998; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). Recent proposals call for altering such undesirable aspects of the role in order to increase the number of individuals willing to seek the position.

Job Attraction Theory

Redesigning the principalship by altering the less desirable aspects of the role is consistent with a job attraction framework formulated by Rynes and Barber (1990). These recruitment theorists concluded that the most important predictors of job attraction are the individual characteristics of the job seeker, attributes of the job, and organizational characteristics (conditions of the workplace). Employers faced with a shortage of qualified applicants for position vacancies can increase the size of the applicant pool by modifying the undesirable aspects of the job.

Determining which aspects of the principalship should be modified to enhance teacher attraction for the position is difficult for at least two reasons. First, teacher reactions to job alterations may be subject to individual differences such as gender (Winter, 1996), years of teaching experience (Young, Rinehart & Heneman, 1993), and job assignment level (Winter & Dunaway, 1997; Winter, McCabe, & Newton, 1998). Second, much of the current research reflects the perceptions of practicing administrators and may not generalize to teachers as prospective applicants (Taylor & Bergmann, 1987). In this research we contribute to the literature by examining whether teacher reactions to aspects of principalship are subject to individual differences among the teachers and by using teachers, rather than administrators, as study participants.

Methodology

We used a correlational study design casting the independent variables as predictors in a multiple regression analysis with teacher ratings of the job serving as the dependent variable. Teacher characteristics, job attributes, and working conditions served as the independent variables and "Teacher Attraction for Principalship" served as the dependent variable.

Study Participants

All full-time professors teaching courses in educational administration invited the students enrolled in their classes to complete a survey. Seventy percent (N = 139) of the students elected to participate. The study sample consisted of nearly equal numbers of females (n = 67) and males (n = 72) representing all levels of K-12 schooling (elementary school = 40, middle school = 39, high school = 55, not teaching = 5).

Independent Variables

The independent variables were teacher characteristics, job attributes, and working conditions. Teacher characteristics (race, gender, job experience, school level) were determined

by self-report on a demographic data form. We used a multi-step process to generate the job attributes and working conditions likely to influence teacher attraction to principalship. First, we reviewed the literature (e.g., Cuban, 1988; Greenfield, 1995; Murphy & Shipman, 1999) to identify the major roles or attributes of the job. Principals impact student learning, influence school culture, manage the school, relate to the larger community, influence the fairness of school processes, and influence public policy. Next, we reviewed the literature to generate a list of variables purported to diminish attraction for the role (Adams, 1999; Doud & Keller, 1998; ERS & others, 1998; Yerkes & Guaglinone, 1997). Students enrolled in a graduate level education course (N = 45) reviewed the list of variables derived from the literature and wrote narratives to identify any additional variables that influenced their perceptions of the principalship. Based on an analysis of the teacher narratives, we added site-based decision making (SBDM) to the variables derived from the literature. This process yielded the teacher characteristics (n = 4), job attributes (n = 6), and working conditions (n = 11) included in the survey instrument.

Dependent Variable

The additive composite score of teacher responses to three questions represented a measure of job attraction: (1) "How do you rate the overall attractiveness of principalship?" (1 = Very Unattractive; 5 = Very Attractive), (2) "How likely are you to apply for principalship?" (1 = Very Unlikely; 5 = Very Likely), and (3) "If you apply for principalship, how likely are you to obtain a position? (1 = Very Unlikely; 5 = Very Likely). A similar approach to measurement of job attraction has been used extensively in educational recruitment studies (e.g., Winter, 1996; Young, Rinehart & Place, 1989; Young et al., 1993). Coefficient alpha for the three items (.74) is above the minimum recommended for use of composite scores for statistical analysis (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

At the data collection stage, the participating teachers (1) completed a demographic data form, (2) indicated the degree to which each job feature and condition of the workplace influenced their decision making about whether or not to become a principal (1 = Minimal Influence, 5 = Great Influence), and (3) responded to the three items designed to measure overall job attraction. To analyze the data, we cast the teacher characteristics, teacher ratings of attributes of the job, and teacher ratings of conditions of the workplace as the independent variables and the additive composite score of teacher responses to the three items as the dependent variable in a hierarchical multiple regression analysis (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, p. 120).

Results

The mean composite rating of teacher attraction to the job (12.6) was above the scale midpoint (3 = the least positive rating; 15 = the most positive rating). However, only 32% of the 139 teachers gave principalship the highest rating of "Very Attractive" and 13% of the teachers reported that they do not intend to seek principalship. Table 1 contains the mean ratings of the degree to which each job feature and condition of the workplace influenced the decision making of teachers about whether to pursue principalship.

Insert Table 1 about here

Because the correlations between all job attributes and the dependent variable were positive and the intercorrelations among the six attributes were consistently high, we collapsed these variables into a single index labeled "The Job." The intercorrelations among the variables related to conditions of the workplace indicated that these variables may not make unique

contributions to the variance in the dependent variable. Consequently, we computed a factor analysis to identify the underlying dimensions of the 11 issues (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The potential deterrents to the principalship that loaded significantly (.49 or above) on each of the two identified components are listed in Table 2. The first component ("Internal Conditions") directly influences the daily work of principals. The second component ("External Conditions") influences the work of principals less directly.

Insert Table 2 about here

We used hierarchical regression analysis to assess the covariation between the independent variables (teacher characteristics, job attributes, internal conditions, external conditions) and the dependent variable (teacher attraction to principalship). We entered the independent variables into the equation based on the order in which the teacher experienced the variable. First, we entered the demographic characteristics of the participating teachers (gender, race) followed by characteristics acquired via the career decisions of the participants (job experience, school level). Because most of the participants intend to seek principalship, we next entered the six attributes of the position. Finally, we entered the working conditions or potential barriers in the order most likely to be experienced by the participating teachers (i.e., internal conditions followed by external conditions). Table 3 contains the results of the hierarchical regression analysis conducted to assess the covariation between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Insert Table 3 about here

Holding all other variables in the equation constant, gender, job attributes, and working conditions accounted for 38% of the variance in teacher attraction to principalship [F (3, 135), 27.390, $p < .05$]. The major findings were as follows: (a) males were more attracted to the job than were females (B = .225), (b) attributes of the job enhanced teacher attraction for principalship (B = .517), and (c) internal conditions of the workplace diminished teacher attraction for principalship (B = -.174).

Discussion

In this study, we measured the relative influence of variables likely to influence teacher attraction for principalship and assessed whether reactions to these variables were subject to individual differences among the teachers. As anticipated, most of the participants were highly attracted to the job and, consistent with the tenets of job attraction theory (Rynes & Barber, 1990), attributes of the job "swamped" other variables in terms of job attraction. Consistent with the results obtained from school administrators, internal conditions of the workplace (e.g., the potential for job-related stress, time requirements) mitigated the positive influence of the job attributes. In other words, the participating teachers were attracted to the work itself but discouraged by the conditions in which the work must be carried out. Female teachers were more likely to be deterred by the undesirable working conditions than were male teachers. Contrary to results obtained from school administrators, salary neither enhanced nor diminished teacher attraction for principalship. Equally surprising was the finding that an educational initiative prevalent in the research context (i.e., legally-mandated local governance structures in all public schools) diminished teacher attraction for the job.

As noted previously, recent proposals to retool the principal's role in order to increase the size of the applicant pool are consistent with the tenets of job attraction theory (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Unfortunately, community leaders desiring to implement such proposals have little empirical evidence to inform their decision making. The results of this exploratory begin to unearth some of the complexities of revising the principal's role in ways that will appeal to teachers. We encourage further investigation of the reactions of prospective applicants to features of principalship. At a minimum, our preliminary findings suggest that applicant reactions to job revisions may vary by gender and position in the organizational hierarchy (prospective applicant, job incumbent). More generally, we invite researchers to examine whether community leaders have unilateral power to alter the principal's role. It remains to be determined whether the existing norms and expectations for principals originate in the formal job descriptions designed by community leaders or from long-standing and deeply embedded perceptions of members of the community, teachers, and students.

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Table 1

Teacher Ratings of the Influence of Job Attributes and Working Conditions

Variable		Mean	SD
Job Attributes	Student Learning	4.4	1.0
	Culture	4.3	1.0
	Management	4.2	1.0
	Fairness	4.2	0.9
	Community	4.0	1.0
	Policy	3.6	1.0
Working Conditions	Family Considerations	3.8	1.2
	Salary	3.6	1.0
	Time	3.4	1.2
	Stress	3.0	1.3
	Testing/Accountability	3.0	1.2
	Labor Market Conditions	3.0	1.2
	Societal Problems	2.9	1.2
	SBDM	2.9	1.1
	Criticism of Schools	2.8	1.3
	School Violence	2.6	1.1
	School Funding	2.4	1.1

Table 2

Factor Loadings for Internal and External Conditions

Internal Conditions	
Job-related Stress	.83
Time	.79
Accountability for Student Learning	.60
Site-based Decision-Making	.56
School Violence	.51
Societal Problems	.49
External Conditions	
Criticism of Public Schools	.71
Labor Market Conditions	.70
Family Considerations	.60
Level of School Funding	.58
Salary	.49

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of the Predictor Variables on Job Attraction

Predictor Variables	Beta Coefficient	t Value
1. Race	0.076	0.274
2. Gender	0.225	3.276**
3. Job Experience	0.084	1.236
4. School Level	0.023	0.309
5. The Job	0.517	7.458**
6. Internal Conditions	-0.174	-2.497*
7. External Conditions	0.116	1.675

$R^2 = .38$ [F (3, 135), 27.390, $p < .05$]

$N = 139$

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

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